Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

JOHN BERG

Interviewed by: Richard L. Jackson

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Q: This is the oral history interview with John Berg conducted December 30, 1998 at the American embassy in Paris by Richard L. Jackson. Mr. Berg, as we were talking over lunch, could you begin by telling us a little bit about where you grew up and what the formative experiences were that drew you into this line of work?

BERG: Yes, indeed. John Berg came from Germany as a displaced person at the end of May 1945. Due to racial Nazi persecution, we lived illegally in Germany for 28 months, were liberated by the Soviets, and then came to France in the company of our friend's French prisoners of war. So, here we are in Paris, France. It's beautiful.

Q: In growing up in pre-war Germany and seeing the Nazi era come, that must have been a terrible time there. You were there at the time of Kristallnacht.

BERG: That is correct. Hitler came into official functions in 1933. Their action was violent even before 1933. Gradually, it became worse and worse all the time. My family, who was a good middle class German family of religious Jewish faith, had lived in Germany for four generations. Little by little, the situation became worse for us. We were forced to attend Jewish schools exclusively. My school in the Fazanenstrasse of Berlin was adjacent to a very impressive synagogue. Incidently, the German emperor had donated the windows for that synagogue. Adjacent was my school. During the Kristallnacht of 1937, where the Nazis burned just about every synagogue throughout Germany, they did burn down this one and, consequently, my school. So, there were from there on, private lessons, which were totally illegal, but we did that and continued to exist under not very pleasant conditions in Germany.

My father, who had a good running business, was forced eventually to give it up and close down within 15 days' notice. The legal word was "You will close your business. If not, we will take appropriate action against you." So, Father had no choice but to close down and was then forced to become a factory worker. Management of the factory had promised my father that for, as long as he would work for the factory in a satisfactory manner, his wife (my mother), and myself could exist legally under those conditions.

On February 27, 1943, however, mother and I had already left our home and lived with a very good person who used to be our maid. We stayed at her apartment. My father, who had been there on the previous evening, a Friday evening, the Shabbat, had had a pleasant dinner with us. As usual, he was giving me his blessings, and that was the last time that I saw him. On Saturday morning, February 27th, 1943, the SS troops went into each factory that employed Jewish staff members. They did that at seven o'clock in the morning. When they did it at Father's factory, two people from the team tried to escape over the roof, but were shot to death. So, Father was arrested and deported. When they loaded him on a railroad train, somehow he had a postcard in his pocket somewhere. He addressed it, as we had agreed, to a previous client, a beauty shop in one of the large Berlin hotels, simply saying, "They have gotten me. I hope and pray that my wife and my son will make it alive." He dropped the card on the floor and some kind person mailed it. The beauty shop at the hotel received the card and gave it to my mother.

Mother and I then lived illegally for 28 months in Nazi Germany.

Q: Was that in Berlin?

BERG: It was mainly in Berlin. Sometimes, we went to other locations, other small cities, but I will say, if this ever happens to anyone, it is a lot better to do it in a large city than in a small location where you are instantly identified. So, about three months prior to the end of the war, some of our good friends, who had a house out in the country approximately 100 kilometers northwest of Berlin, had told us that if we could get there, we may live in that house, but should not leave it - just stay inside the house. Mother did go out now and then hoping and managing to get a little bit of food. She managed to do that. We had good friends there, French prisoners of war, who supplied a little bit of food, a little bit of bread, a little bit of this and that now and then.

Just about the end of April or beginning May of 1945, our friends came up to see us and said, "It's time to move out. The Soviets are coming." As far as we were concerned, we didn't care if it was the Soviets or not. Just anybody would have been better than the Nazis. Well, I listened to a detector radio, a small radio installation with headphones. I had a long antenna. I was aware of the different movements of the Allied troops, but sure enough, the Russians were the first. Their frontline troops were not very funny either. However, we did manage after liberation by them to see their commanding officer. The commanding officer gave us a free choice. He said, "We, the Soviets, could move you to the Soviet Union, or we could bring you back to the city of Berlin where you originated from, or, as your friends, the French prisoners of war, were being repatriated to their home country, France, you may join them." We preferred that option because the emblem for France has always been "Libertï¿½, Egalitï¿½, Fraternitï¿½" and that was a good symbol. So, we decided to move with them to France. It took a month to get there. It was quite an experience. There were lots of transit camps. But all that was fair. Then we arrived in Paris, the beautiful city, even so quite different in May of 1945, but it was definitely libertï¿½, egalitï¿½, fraternitï¿½. It was paradise.

So, our first thought was to see if we have any indication of what happened to my father. The Russians and everybody else said that they had lists, but whatever research we had done didn't lead to anything. There was no trace left. So, at that point, I told my mother, "Now that Dad is not to return, it will be up to me to support you." Because of being grateful to the U.S., my ideal was to work for Uncle Sam. Over and above it all, my highest admiration was for the U.S. forces. So, I tried very, very hard to get a job for the U.S. Army. One problem was, I was too young. But then, due to the help of some friendly people, to whom I talked about it... I wanted to see the Jewish chaplain of Western Base Section, U.S. Army, in Paris. I explained the situation. The chaplain had been kind. He had once received a package that came from relatives in the USA. There was no postal service, so they had sent it APO to the Jewish chaplain, who forwarded it to us. He at that time said, "Mrs. Berg, if ever there is anything that I can do for you, don't hesitate to call on me." I did remember these words, went back to see the chaplain, and he in no time managed to get me a job with the U.S. Army in 1946. That is where I started. I worked for the Western Base Section, U.S. Army.

Q: Picking up English and French in the process?

BERG: French little by little. My parents had sent me to English language lessons since we had desperately tried to immigrate to Australia. So, by that time, my English wasn't all that bad. But you do forget it, of course, when you don't speak it during the war. But it all came back pretty rapidly. So, here we were, Western Base Section, U.S. Army.

I had a very small job. I was a supply clerk. But so what? It meant a job and it meant a salary. When the Western Base Section had accomplished its mission, there was one U.S. Army unit left here. I will forever be proud of having served that unit. It was the Corps of Engineers. The American Graves Registration Command, our command, established monuments, but mainly World War II cemeteries for our fallen comrades in arms. The ones who remained in Europe are approximately 40%. Sixty percent were shipped out through Carentan in Normandy to Cherbourg, France, where they were returned to the United States as per request of next of kin. The remaining 40% will remain forever in U.S. military cemeteries throughout Europe. One more time, I feel totally proud having served that unit because I did feel that I repaid my debt.

So, from 1947 until 1949, I worked for that unit. Then, their mission was accomplished. At that moment, I served as a passport and visa clerk, mainly getting visas which were required throughout Europe for the members of our command who had to travel to other European countries. So, at that time, when that mission was accomplished, the European Cooperation Administration under directions of the late Ambassador Averell Harriman, opened their office in Paris, commonly known as the Marshall Plan. It was the Economic Cooperation Administration.

I was fortunate enough to get a job there of similar kind. I became a passport and visa clerk for that organization. This job eventually brought me into the transportation field - passenger transportation, VIP receptions, whatever logistical support has to be given to VIPs. There, I served until October of 1953. The Marshall Plan had accomplished their mission and closed down. The administration had found that I was a worthwhile employee and integrated me into the Administrative Section of the American embassy in Paris. So, here I was. I had a relatively good job. I had a salary. I was able to support my mother. I was relatively happy under the circumstances.

The problem that remained was that, due to the fact that the Germans way back in 1937 deprived us of our original German citizenship, I served as a local employee at the embassy while my colleagues were French subjects, or British, or whatever else. I was stateless. I had no citizenship. I had approached the Consular Service of our embassy to see what I could do to get a U.S. naturalization. That wasn't possible from this end.

Q: The Germans would have given you citizenship, but you, of course,would not have wanted that.

BERG: That is correct. They offered to return our original German citizenship at their embassy, but due to what they had done for moral reasons, I told whoever was concerned, "I can never stand again for Germany." I feel very strongly that whoever takes a citizenship has to stand for that country and that flag. I could not for Germany. Consequently, Mother and I remained stateless.

During my job at the embassy, the section was called the "conference attache for congressional relations." I had the good pleasure and honor to meet, assist, and accompany just about every congressman or senator coming or leaving France. Being that this was a good service to them, they all took an interest in me. The first reaction was, "John, where do you come from?" It wasn't all that funny, but I told them the story every time. So, they did mention at one point, "John, there must be something that can be done about it." My reaction was, "No" because through a legal way, I could not. It would have meant to give up my job, immigrate to the States, then work for four or five years, then become naturalized, and then hopeful and possibly get another government job.

Q: You have your mother here.

BERG: I was the only support for my mom. Consequently, I did not have the courage to tear out of the little I had gotten to start off with nothing. This I could not do. So, at that point, some of the congressional visitors... And I will say it right now: the first one who started it was the late Senator Jacob Javits, who proposed to introduce a bill in the House. He did that. The bill dragged along. After one year, my superiors at the embassy said, "John, the bill is going to die if nothing happens now, so you had better call Senator Javits and tell him to please reactivate." I didn't have the courage at first to do that, but being that they insisted very strongly, I did call the senator. The Senator told me he would reactivate the bill. I believe he did, but nothing ever happened. Meanwhile, the person, Senator Tom Harkin from Iowa... In those days, the congressman told me that "If Senator Javits introduced the bill on the Senate side, I will be happy to introduce it on the House side." So, with the private bill being on the Hill on the House and the Senate side, I think on the Senate side, it didn't get much beyond that point. But Tom Harkin defended it to the maximum extent. He has my thanks and my recognition for outstanding action for the rest of my life. He defended my case to an unbelievable extent. Then, believe it or not, after four years, in 1980, the bill was approved first on the Congress and then on the Senate side and then finally signed off by the President of the United States. So, here this outstanding accomplishment happened: John Berg was no longer stateless. He became the forever proud citizen of the United States of America.

Q: What a wonderful story. During these years as that was going forward, you continued to work at the embassy in Paris dealing with more and more volume of high level visitors. You had the Paris Peace Talks over Vietnam. You had almost every President, probably not only once, but many times.

BERG: That is correct.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about the highlights of that?

BERG: The very important meetings here are the Vietnam Peace Talks with Phil Habib and many others which were held here in our embassy. This meant many, many important visits and lots of activities. But there again, I am proud to say that, it may be only one little part of it, but I did participate. So on that went through many meetings here. Henry Kissinger, who came and traveled incognito to negotiate, was in the Paris area. Many of the visits... Like you said, there were a lot of presidential visits and vice presidential visits, Secretary of State visits, unlimited. Again, I was proud to participate. As the years went on, I continued in the same field to work on the same activities. We just finished the latest Secretary of State visit here at the beginning of December of this year.

Q: That was Mrs. Albright's visit.

BERG: Yes. That was a brief visit, but it usually entails many details, a large support staff, traveling press, communications, and whatever goes with it. It is all fascinating. We're just ready for the next one.

Q: What makes a visit go well? I am sure that your long-term contacts throughout Paris, at the airport, with French officialdom, have got a lot to do with it.

BERG: That is correct. I think in the long run (This may sound funny to you.) that if they're not planned too far ahead of time, short notice is usually best. If not, we just have repeated and repeated advance meetings. They all boil down to more or less the same thing. There are very minor little divergencies like the plane is not going to come in at 1700 but at 1730. The number is usually identical. They're very numerous. The important part here is to have good contacts with our host government friends, mainly at the French Foreign Office, police authorities, customs, airport authorities, and take it from there. Glue it all together with a capable staff that we have at this embassy from the point of view of the chief of mission, deputy chief of mission, Political Section, Administrative Section, and the entire workforce. If they all work hand in hand, we can accomplish a very satisfactory visit.

Q: U.S.-French relations come and go. Sometimes, they are very strained. Other times, they are very close. Is that reflected at the working level when you're doing visits? Do you notice the difference?

BERG: To tell you the truth, not very much. They are, like we are, technical experts in a specific field as functionaries. If you have an opposition or if you have a leading support from protocol at the French Foreign Office, that can open unlimited doors. That is one of the reasons why the government keeps me in the present position. From the point of view of airport police, immigration, customs relations, that is based a lot on a long-lasting friendships among the people in that position, my own, and my colleagues. If you know how to handle their habits and their preferences, you may give them a little here and they will give a little on their side. So, that is when you can do a lot of things. I am proud to say that I have a good number of friends on the French side who will continue to be as helpful. That is a very good feeling.

Q: Thinking back on all the visits that you've had, which ones stand out? What were the crisis moments for you? There have been some that must have kept you awake nights.

BERG: Yes, that is true. I think at the moment of the liberation of our colleagues from Iran who were then flown to the Wiesbaden Military Hospital, we had a very important visit here. I trust it was presidential. Our ambassador then flew out in the evening to greet our colleagues on their arrival in Germany. They then returned during the very early morning hours from Wiesbaden back to Paris. I remember spending the entire night at the airport. I will very proudly say it: airport and police authorities told me, "John, the installation is at your disposal for as long as you need them." This included their protective troops alongside from the airport all the way to the ambassador's residence. So, that is a good feeling. They were all available just to cover that very important event.

Q: The returnees from Wiesbaden were the ambassador and thPresident or the hostages?

BERG: Just the ambassador and the President.

Q: That was President Reagan.

BERG: Right.

Q: You have seen so many presidents come through. Do any details stick in your mind of your interaction? Your wall is covered with commendations from the White House from presidents and secretaries.

BERG: I am very proud of that, but I have been and will continue to be very devoted to every one of them. I have enjoyed every one of them. There are many, many events that can mark your memory. For instance, when Princess Grace of Monaco died in an automobile accident, Nancy Reagan was the White House lead to be present for the funeral in Monaco. A support delegation from our embassy went down to Nice and then on to Monaco to receive the First Lady and whatever officials who came in on the U.S. side for that funeral. The world's monarchy was represented there. It was a very outstanding event that I will never forget. For instance, after the end of the ceremonies, the First Lady had a Monegasque motorcycle escort to their close-by national border andthen was picked up by French gendarmes from Monaco to Nice airport, where Air Force One was waiting for her and her delegation. On arrival, I usually tell the Secret Service that as a tradition in this country, the leading personality thanks, if possible by handshake, the commanding officer of the motorbike escort. Nancy Reagan not only did that to the commanding officer, but she shook hands with every one of the officers by number of 24. As each one of them were taking a picture at the end of this, that was myself where Nancy Reagan shook hands with me and thanked me for my action in Monaco. It was something to be very proud of. I was embarrassed because I left here in a hurry with no notice. I had curls on the back of my head because I didn't have time for a haircut. It was still a very, very, very impressive picture for me, which I am very proud to have.

Q: As word of your efficiency began to get out in the U.S. Foreign Service, I am very well aware that ambassadors all over the place who transited Paris were calling you and asking for help. How did you field all the requests, establish priorities, and go out to meet some, but you can't meet them all? How did you make those calls?

BERG: I have a deputy and, if needed, we'll split it. He does one and I do the other. It is a decision of the front office here of who gets the top notch assistance and who may be in a secondary line. We can always manage with other officers from the embassy simply to go out and, on a courtesy basis, greet them and bring them into town. For me, it's usually a bit more because you eliminate immigration delays, you walk them straight through, and do it to the maximum extent. So, there you are. I am very pleased to say that, now having served the United States Government for over 50 years, I have received recognition for 50 years of active service to the U.S. Government. Again, this is something that I am very proud of. Ambassador Felix Rohatyn had set up a very pleasant reception in my honor for my 50 years. That was certainly very impressive. I received a very nice letter of congratulations on this occasion from President Bill Clinton. I am proud to have that letter. After a long career, I was pleased to have that recognition.

Q: One of your important clients is the U.S. ambassador in Paris, of whom you have seen many. You must have to adapt to very sudden changes of style and request. How has that work been over the years, thinking of the many ambassadors you have served with distinction: Harriman, Walter Curley, Joe Rodgers, all strong individuals with very different operating styles, I would assume?

BERG: You're right. They're all different. I've found every one of them most pleasant. When I think back to Charles Bohlen a long time ago, he was a great career ambassador. We did not have too many career ambassadors. Arthur Hartman was another one. I was pleased to serve him and his family. Other than that, they were all political appointees. I will say they were most friendly. Obviously, you have to adapt yourself to their demands and their style, but for as long as you do that, you are coming out alright.

Q: Which was the most challenging ambassador to work with in thsense of the demands?

BERG: It's hard to say. It was more or less identical. Obviously, the ambassador will ask you with a smile. If you then accomplish and do it with a smile, then that comes out identical, more or less.

Q: Making things go smoothly in an embassy like Paris, the largest - nearly 50 agencies, the team of ambassador and DCM and how well they mesh is very important. I'm sure your relations with each of the DCMs has been very important in setting the priorities on the big visits.

BERG: Absolutely.

Q: Has the division of work differed from different teams as far ayou have observed or is it fairly standard here?

BERG: It is fairly standard. The only difference is that we may have based on directions as they come in from the Department. Rules may be tighter now or less tight. This is based on politics and the financial situation of our budget, which imposes a difference now.

Q: Speaking of budget, you have lived through a period of unlimited post-war resources, reconstruction and building up the embassy and then in recent years, draconian cuts. We have closed most of the consulates in France. The staff of the embassy, American and Foreign Service national, has dropped off sharply. How was it to live through all of that and what has been the impact in terms of getting the job done?

BERG: That's number one: the job must be done. Obviously, at moments of budgetary crises, it becomes more difficult. We had periods where there was a question of being suspended because of a non-existing budget. But in actual fact, we had some of our people out... That we closed down the Consular Section for a while, which was more than embarrassing. But no budget - what can you do? Personally, I have never been affected. Yes, there was a salary check that wouldn't come in that followed shortly afterwards. So, I really can't complain. I think that if the budget situation is tight, everybody around the table has to do their maximum to economize. I have always tried to do that.

Q: You mentioned the Consular Section shut down briefly. Didn't most of the embassy itself shut during the closure of government in 1995?

BERG: Not the essential parts of the embassy. The Political Section, the Administrative Section, and the Economic Section continued to work, maybe on a reduced manpower, but we did continue to operate. It was mainly the Consular Section.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about security and the increasing impact of it on your life and the embassy's life? You had in Paris the assassination attempt against the charge then, Chris Chapman. There was a military attachï¿½ killed in Paris.

BERG: Yes, that is correct. Sadly enough, one of our assistant army attaches was shot to death. There is a plaque in his memory here at the lobby of our embassy. Ever since, we have constant warnings to use different routes and different times to come to work. That is a nice theory, but how do you do that in actual practice? You necessarily come out of the building that you live in, you work at the same time, so that is difficult to do. But I think what needs to be done and hopeful that works is use common sense, look around, don't leave your name, don't leave an indication of where you are and who you are, use common sense. Obviously, we have severe warnings. The guards in front of this embassy have been reinforced. We have our own private guards. We have the gendarmerie out in front. I think that is about the best you can do. We no longer use official diplomatic plates. The maximum of our fleet runs with regular Paris license plates. That is about all you can do.

Q: In gaining that kind of change from the French authorities, do you have a lot of discussion with them of reciprocity - they give us this and we must get that in Washington, that kind of thing?

BERG: Basically, I believe that is the case, but I am not personally involved in that. I have the good privilege of enjoying what has been negotiated. I will frankly say I take advantage of it.

Q: But this focus on security must have affected your job as you deal with so many VIP visitors from the presidents on down, getting them in and out of airports. How has it impacted?

BERG: We use the most secure routes. We vary our routes. We do not use the same at all times. I will say that the protection on the French side and adapting themselves to that security problem is very satisfactory.

Q: You told me over lunch that, as a result of a visit that you managed here, perhaps President Clinton's, you had the opportunity to work on a visit in Berlin. I thought that was very interesting.

BERG: Yes, that is correct. After a presidential visit to Paris, I was told that the next big event for their logistical support team was a visit to Berlin. It must have been about four years ago. One of the projects on that trip was to inaugurate what they call the "new synagogue of Berlin." Knowing that my father while he was alive was very active in the cultural events of the Jewish community in Berlin, he had been forced to dismount with other friends and myself their own synagogue because the Nazis wanted to use it as a military supply depot. So, my dad did that and I gave a helping hand. The Nazis had then decided to reinstall that synagogue and so we did. So, when I heard about the inauguration of the synagogue in Berlin, I felt it was my duty, my morale obligation, to represent my dad, who was no longer alive. So, I was fortunate enough to participate in the logistical supports of the President's visit to Berlin and mainly to participate in the visit of what they call the "new synagogue." It may be a new installation because it has been established as a new cultural meeting point between Germans and Jewish or whatever other religion. The synagogue itself is an ancient building on the Oranienburgerstrasse. It is an old, old building that survived the Nazi terrorism. It was interesting to know that while the Nazis had given out orders on the Kristallnacht, that when they set a synagogue to fire, the fire department should not appear to fight the fire. In the instance of this synagogue, Oranienburgerstrasse, there was a German police officer who had the charge of that location and ordered the fire department to come. When they reported that "We have orders not to come," he insisted, "I am the police officer in charge and I am ordering you to come." They came and extinguished the fire. The building survived. It is an impressive building. The police officer who took that heroic decision has passed away since, but on the inauguration of the German police school, that school was named after him.

Q: You must have gone back with a mixture of loathing and wonder tsee Berlin after those years.

BERG: I did indeed. So many things have changed. It is a pleasant city, but obviously, as you said, it brings back all sorts of memories. So, it is not always joyful to be there.

Q: Did you find awareness among younger Germans of the past, ohistory?

BERG: Not really. There are very few, but in general the attitudis "I don't know. I'm too young. I never knew."

Q: You mentioned that there were adjacent monuments to Russian anNazi victims.

BERG: Yes. On a much earlier trip, renting a car while in Berlin, driving by the Steinplatz, which is not too far from the zoo railroad station, there is a permanent memorial to the victims of soviet persecution. There are lots of flags, flowers, whatever else. Then, there is another identical monument in memory of the victims of the Nazi persecution. Incidentally, this monument was built with the stones of the synagogue where I attended school. So, seeing no flowers, no flags, and strictly nothing on the second monument, I had decided to buy flowers, which I did. I bought flowers, brought them back in a vase that is permanently installed, put water in there, then continued my business after a moment of silent attention. When I returned 45 minutes later, there were no flowers left. A storekeeper across the street, whom I had asked for water, continued to stare at this monument like "Who ever would go to that monument?" I went back to see her and ask if she had seen who could have taken the flowers. She said, "I didn't see anything. No. No way. Better tell the police." The police officer nearby would say, "This is too much for my competence. Go and see the station." The police station, full of men, said, "We're understaffed. People steal flowers from public gardens. If I had more manpower, would I put a permanent guard at this monument..." I then explained that if the general attitude is that it takes an armored guard to guard this monument, it means that the mentality of their city is so that one does not wish to be there. That is where I told them please to take protocol of my statement and that I was going to leave the city at that moment. I requested that this report be given to the mayor of the city.

Q: You were American by citizenship, mentality, and work habits, but you were born in Europe and lived your life in Europe. Looking at this new year with the launching of the euro and the developments that you've seen in Europe, such as the merger of East and West Germany and a united Europe, how do you feel about all that?

BERG: That is a complicated question that is not so easy to answer. One important factor that gives me satisfaction is, I feared for the unification of East and West Germany to be an overall great Germany again, which apparently has not happened. They are separated and it doesn't look like they will become the overall German power. That pleases me.

Of what develops of the euro and European Community remains to be seen. It seems to me, not too much of a politician, far from it, I think that Europe does not have a united position. Everybody has brilliant projects and suggestions, but there is not a united Europe policy in existence yet. Things don't come from one day to the next such as the euro and such as the united European Community. It will take a while. It remains to be seen what may develop in the future.

Q: I know that you're a busy man and I don't want to take up further time, but I am wondering, thinking that this oral history will be read by young people starting out in a Foreign Service career and others along in the career deciding between administration, political, or economic specialties, you have seen an awful lot of people come through this embassy, supposedly the best and the brightest. You have seen the Dick Holbrookes come at a young age. You've seen them come back at an older age. Have you got any thoughts on what makes a Dick Holbrooke or somebody like that stand out? Also, the career as you see it coming up on the next century, is it as relevant and as vital?

BERG: It continues to be vital. I feel very strongly that my colleagues in the Foreign Service by majority are pretty brilliant people. Some of them make out in an outstanding manner like the ones you have mentioned. But all together, I feel proud of the average Foreign Service officer. I can only strongly encourage junior officers to develop a fascinating career. I think that while diplomats no longer have the same task as they had 100 years ago or longer, the Foreign Service of the United States is pretty vital, not only for the United States, but also whether they admit it or not, for Europe and for the entire free world. It takes intelligent politics in a very difficult way to try to keep the peace in the world and a better and brighter future for future generations.

Q: That is a good answer. Being European and then becoming American, being an FSN [Foreign Service national] and then becoming an American officer, how was that transition? How do you view the FSN, American officer, American staff split? I assume that when you became an American, your status, salary, pay, all that, changed.

BERG: It was done in an intelligent way. The Department, knowing that this naturalization now that I had accomplished U.S. citizenship terminated my FSN position on a Friday evening at 6:00 p.m. and picked me up on the following Monday morning at 9:00 am on a Civil Service position. The idea (and I feel totally satisfied with it) was not to make a financial advantage of this honorary situation. So, throughout the 35 years or so that I had served as an FSN, I continued to enjoy the same salary. It was converted from an FSN-9 position to a Civil Service position as a GS-11. The financial flexibility was established to be within $50 and that is what it is. So, the financial situation didn't change much except (and this is no complaint) that in the Civil Service position that I now enjoy as a resident officer, I can remain here for as long as I wish, I will not be promoted, while in the FSN position, after a while, you get a promotion here or there. But I am not complaining about that. I am perfectly satisfied.

Q: The FSNs remain the continuity and the backbone of an operatiolike Paris.

BERG: Absolutely. They are very numerous here and they are totallvital to us.

I've failed to mention an important moment of my career. When the Polish Premier, Walesa, received the Nobel Prize and was unable to come out of Poland to receive it here, I had the good opportunity to be called by Elie Weisel, who had decided with a group of people to go to Krakow, Poland, to deliver the Nobel Prize. It appeared that the number of people with them (around 15 or 20 in total) did not have Polish visas. I accepted to fly with Mr. and Mrs. Weisel and the delegation on a chartered airplane to Krakow, Poland. I faced the Polish immigration officers, Polish military, explained our situation, saying, "We have no visas, but we're going to visit the Auschwitz concentration camp." They accepted our deplaning, holding passports, issuing the visas while we went to Auschwitz. Walesa was there, greeted us, and went with us to the not too distant concentration camp of Auschwitz. That is where my dad was deported to. I did this with the honor of being able to see my dad's ever remaining place. According to our religion, I was able to say the Kaddish, the prayer for the dead, right there where the last steps of his life was. It is not easy to do that. Even though this must have been five or six years ago, the smell of the smoke is still existing.

The team of the Walesa delegation was smart enough to charge me while moving around the camp to keep the press away from us, which they were quite anxious to do. That was a good thing. If you're not busy doing something like chasing journalists, you could easily break down. I was pretty close to that point. But one of the leading politicians from France, Mr. J. Attalie, a well-known man, put his hand on my shoulder and said, "John, be brave." I was able to do that, but that is a very hard thing to do. It is something that one must and should remember for the rest of his or her life. I felt strongly to express this in this interview and I'm sorry if I didn't do it earlier in our conversation, Dick.

Q: Thank you, John. That concludes this very interesting interview.

BERG: Thank you.

End of interview